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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001773

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SUBJECT: AFP NARROWLY MISSES JI/ASG TERRORIST TARGETS

REF: MANILA 1614

Classified By: (U) Political Officer Paul O'Friel  
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (S) SUMMARY. Light reaction companies of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) narrowly missed capturing the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terrorist Dulmatin and senior Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) leaders Khaddafy Janjalani and Abu Solaiman during a tightly compartmented April 15-16 raid on the terrorists' hideout. The attack achieved strategic and operational surprise, and involved the AFP's first night movement and a nighttime helicopter insertion, both directly resulting from specialized US training and equipment. We are pushing the AFP to keep up its operation tempo against these targets.  
END SUMMARY.

ANOTHER NARROW MISS

12. (S) The AFP's Joint Special Operations Group (JSOG) missed capturing JI operative Dulmatin and senior ASG leaders Khaddafy Janjalani and Abu Solaiman during a compartmentalized operation on April 15-16. Composed of the JSOG's 2nd and 3rd Light Reaction Companies (LRCs), the raiding force attacked a camp on the edges of the Liguasan Marsh in central Mindanao in which Dulmatin, Janjalani, and Abu Solaiman were sheltering, but lost contact with the fleeing terrorists, who managed to escape.

13. (S) The operation involved the first use of the JSOG against ASG/JI targets in Mindanao, and had been planned since early April in close coordination with Military Intelligence Groups (MIG) 21 and 11, which had pinpointed the terrorists' location. To prevent any leak and to protect operational security, AFP Chief of Staff General Efren Abu directed SOUTHCOM Commander LTG Alberto Braganza to bypass the 6th Infantry Division, whose area of operations includes central Mindanao.

WHILE US SUPPORT PROVED KEY...

14. (S) Coordinated multi-agency US support proved key. The AFP had US assistance throughout all phases of the raid. A 10-member Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines operations/intelligence fusion team was present at the JSOG commander's operations center during the engagement to advise him. This team also provided intelligence support from P3 surveillance aircraft and UAVs. RMAS separately provided locational data.

...THE AFP RAN OUT OF STEAM

15. (S) Although the LRCs came close on several occasions during the course of the raid to capturing the fugitive terrorists, after more than 24-hours of continuous combat in difficult terrain they could no longer sustain operations. Additionally, the AFP command structure -- with 6th Infantry Division Commander MG Raul Relano once again evidently playing a dilatory role at a critical moment -- hesitated for four key hours when the MILF's 104 Base Command threatened to counterattack what MILF commanders labeled a violation of the GRP/MILF ceasefire. Without a coherent back-up plan or sufficient follow-on forces or reserves, the AFP broke off contact and withdrew on April 16.

COMMENT

16. (S) This operation is the latest in a series of near-misses for the AFP. On November 19, 2004 and January 27, 2005, in combined arms daylight attacks using aircraft and artillery units, 6th Infantry Division forces narrowly missed Dulmatin's and Janjalani's hideouts. But the most recent engagement demonstrated improvement in the AFP's operations, notably with commanders paying better attention to operations security and compartmentalization, by adding heightened elements of strategic and operational surprise,

and by use of night movement and a nighttime helicopter insertion. The latter elements resulted directly from specialized US training and equipment. The US-trained light reaction companies involved showed aggressive will to fight and good skills.

17. (S) On the negative side, the operation failed. Interservice coordination and employment of combined arms remain weak, and the AFP failed to commit sufficient forces to close off all possible escape routes. Combat commanders also remain over sensitive to the impact their operations may have on peace negotiations with the MILF -- despite President Arroyo's direct orders to the senior command on this point on March 30. Once again, the AFP's decision-making process froze in response to the MILF's threat to intervene.

18. (S) Although not successful, the JSOG in its first large-scale operation gave a good account of itself. Dulmatin, Janjalani, and Abu Solaiman remain on foot and on the run in central Mindanao, whose rough terrain offers limited mobility. JSOTF-P, RMAS, and other Embassy elements are closely engaged with their counterparts to get the AFP to keep up the tempo of its operations and get back in the fight.

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